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A NEWPORT SYMPOSIUM.

BY MRS. BURTON HARRISON.

On the veranda of the Newport house appertaining to the clever and well-to-do Mrs. Gramercy, of New York, a party of people are drinking tea while discussing the formation of an ideal society that shall take precedence over the corporate body at present distressing America at large as the "Four Hundred" of New York.

The hostess (to Mr. Gryde, M. P., who having landed the Saturday previous from the "Lucania," and journeyed at once to see Niagara, has arrived in Newport thoroughly equipped as a commentator on American social life). And pray, what hints have you to contribute to our Utopian project?

Mr. Gryde (spare and dark, with tonsured head, dressed in a neatly fitting suit of gray cassimere and wearing in his button-hole a large bunch of white carnations). Oh! my dear lady, you expect too much of a new-comer. But—if you will permit a mere ghost of a suggestion—

Mrs. Gramercy (with resignation). I see by your smile that we are going to get it! But, go on.

Mr. Gryde (dispassionately, but warming to his subject.) If I had any improvement whatever to suggest in your present amiable and gracious system of social life, it is that you might recall a certain quality of gay and good-humored daring that I seem to remember—that we old-country people have learned to expect from you Americans, and banish a conventionalism that is both material and dull.

Mrs. Gramercy (to the circle). Didn't I say so? They always do, when they begin. But go on. Let the British lion growl!

Mr. Gryde (patiently). In the ideal society, I should exclude from your drawing-rooms the present abiding-evidence of, and the frequent allusion to, money and money's worth.

Mrs. Gramercy. Oh! Oh! As if you English are not the Mammon worshippers of Europe.

Mr. Gryde. Granted. But we do not talk of it at the dinner table. In the ideal society, the host will not entertain the stranger guest with astonishing statements of the money-getting achievement of his neighbors and fellow-revellers. When a noble portrait, painted by some great foreign artist, of the host's wife or daughter, is exhibited, the guest will not be allowed to know the amount of the check rendered in lieu of it. If the host has written a rather successful book upon political economy or finance, he will not confide the retail price of the volume in question when about to offer to present a copy to his friend. If a man takes a stranger for a drive behind a beautiful and covetable pair of well-bred horses, the stranger will not need to know the price paid for them, in order to appreciate their merits. If a new room—some grand *salon* fitted with tapestries from a decayed palace of the Old World—is thrown open, the astonishing cost of these sumptuous draperies will not be whispered about among the guests. When a lovely woman is pointed out at a ball, the chain of jewels around her swan-like neck will not be appraised by her exhibitor. I almost think that, in your ideal society, there should be no such word as dollar.

Pretty little Mrs. Pert (who, to the air of a fashion plate, adds a young child's readiness for fearless attack). Or we might impose a fine of one dollar for charity, every time the word dollar is pronounced. But, dear me, Mr. Gryde, how much you have found out in three days at Newport! Let me tell you that, if you only give us time, we will get over being impressed by our recent acquisitions. Over here, we are still, as you would say, "by way" of thinking it an important thing to dine at eight o'clock, and be served by liveried lackeys. In England, you've had ages in which to exhaust all such minor sensations.

Mr. Gryde (benignantly). We have exhausted most sensations—*except* that to be had in bowing down before the shrine of Beauty.

Little Mrs. Pert. Well, at home, you don't do much bowing down that I ever saw—unless, indeed, the Beauty belongs to some

one else. In that respect, I own, we are behind you. But we are trying hard to catch up.

Mrs. Gramercy. For shame, Edith. It is no such thing, Mr. Gryde. As a class, we are still Puritans.

The Count de Rivoli (a blonde young Frenchman, of charming exterior and polished manner). Madame, I agree with you. So much so, that I ask myself if my penetration be not at fault—if beneath the frozen surfaces so many of your beautiful women present there is not a warm current flowing that needs only the freedom of older societies to break the ice and make it leap into joyous evidence.

Little Mrs. Pert. Unless you are a very good skater, Count, I'd advise you not to venture on that ice.

Mrs. Gramercy. Perhaps the Count will give us a point or two upon what we are to omit from our ideal society.

The Count de Rivoli. Madame! You ask me, who am daily enchanted with the exquisite graciousness of your American hospitalities. But if you insist—if I may presume to follow in the footsteps of Mr. Gryde, to find a fault in the present structure—I should suggest—with a thousand apologies—a slight infusion of gayety into your too formal entertainments. Your houses, your women, your wines, your *chefs*—deserve all admiration; but I would ask to hear talk across the table, instead of little eternal duets around the table—that talk of the wits and of the lips that makes a good dinner a refinement of delight. In the future day you picture, perhaps people will not be chained to each other, two and two, like galley slaves, during the courses of an interminable banquet. The hostess will assume to take the lead of conversation; to let fly a shuttlecock of thought or fancy at which her guests will strike in turn. She will not be content to sit on demurely or wearily while the dining lasts, and look relieved when the affair is over. And ah! Madame, picture to yourself how easy this thing will be for the average American woman—to put life into her reunions! She, who is so gifted by nature with facility of speech and animation of spirit! I cannot for the life of me understand the indifference of some of your reigning hostesses to everything except their decorations, their gowns and their *menus*.

Little Mrs. Pert. You would, if you'd seen them, not so very long ago, living in little hum-drum city houses, with an Irish

girl to wait upon the table, and everything on a scale to correspond. Isn't it like a fairy tale to wake up from that sort of thing and find oneself mistress of a palace in town, a yacht, another palace in the country, and with ability to roam the round world over, and spend money like pouring out water? If that happened to me, I know I'd be dazzled too, and not quite certain what to do with my grandeur.

Mrs. Kindly (bright-eyed and middle-aged and soft of voice). Yes, I think it's wonderful that so many of them carry it off as we see them doing. And, with it all, some of them accomplish an immense amount of charitable work, and educate their children beautifully. I, for one, when they ask me, always love to go into one of their fairy palaces, to be part, as Edith says, of a fairy tale. But I should be sorry to be limited to that class of society. Some of them are so taken up with spending money lavishly, they have hardly time to look around them at the outside world; and, consequently, their atmosphere seems stagnant. Whenever I have been to one of the plutocratic luncheon parties, for example, I like to stop in on the way home to sit awhile with an invalid friend of mine, a woman who has never crossed the threshold of one of the "smart set." How her wit plays around everything I give her of what I have seen and heard to comment upon! How supremely she rises above the narrow limits of the talk I have been listening to about petty ailments, and domestic plans, and the matrimonial difficulties of some conspicuous person of the "set." When the ideal society opens its doors, this friend of mine shall have a corner in it, and you will see how animated her surroundings will become. But I would not exclude the present rulers. We are too much in their debt.

Mrs. Gramercy. While we are excluding, I should like to shut out a fashion of woman who has cropped up latterly; not only mannish and brusque, and given to horse-play and lounging and smoking with men in preference to congregating with her own sex—but persistently inclined to talk down the domestic and sentimental side of a woman's life. (Bless me! When one fancies a woman's lot *without* the domestic and sentimental side!) I have often heard such an one scoff at the natural instinct of affection displayed by a young wife and mother for her husband and child—a "kid," is, I believe, what that type calls her own or

her friend's offspring. What she is good for I can't imagine. She doesn't really entertain men, and she intimidates average women.

Miss Ruth Marchmont (a girl past her first youth, with a keen intellectual face and a fearless bearing). Pshaw ! That sort has no real weight. A woman of any strength of character will live her own life, and find her own happiness, in spite of their sneers at femininity. They are only temporary blots on the surface of our society. I think I object more to the ones who are satisfied with infinite nothings, who fritter conversation, and stare superciliously at all expressions of original thought, then resume their own chatter without an attempt to take in what has been said. When we open the door into the ideal *salon*, pray Heaven they may be left in the corridor.

Mr. Gryde (to Mrs. Gramercy). Triviality of thought and expression, and bluntness of speech, seem to be the "hall mark" upon the fashionable classes everywhere to-day. But I must own I had not yet reached the point of criticising your types, especially of womankind. I look to this conversation for a great deal of enlightenment. Pray, my dear madam, further incite your guests to give me more of these lights upon American society as it is, and as it ought to be.

Mrs. Gramercy (smiling). I am afraid we are always ready to discuss. Nobody is certain what our standard is ; and everybody is curious to know what other people think it is. Unfortunately, we are actually without social leaders. With you, in England, it is so easy to look at a Duchess, and do likewise. When we get back to town every year to open our houses for the season we have no idea who, among our acquaintances, is going to be living in her own house, or to be entertaining, much less setting us examples. The newspaper correspondents make the most heroic effort to create for us heads, who, often as not, are at the time living in London or Paris or at Nice, or travelling in Egypt to get rid of disagreeables at home. I myself think it is the fierce light that beats upon the throne of the New York social celebrity that makes our leaders so few and far between. As soon as a newspaper article appears that is more than any feminine flesh and blood can stand, they remember they have the resource of packing up and sailing for the other side, there to remain until the trouble has been forgotten. Then, too, we have no old women.

Look around you, Mr. Gryde, during the next few days, and you will never see a woman's head with a cap upon it, like those dear old stately dowagers one sees in England. To the bitter end of comeliness, we coif ourselves with false hair, and dress youthfully. Oh! (*Here the mistress of the veranda claps her white hands be-gemmed with diamonds and turquoises.*) In the ideal society, let us have some gray hair and some caps!

Mrs. Kindly. I am sure, Agatha, you and I know several older women, of the best blood in the land too, women whose families have always been accustomed to lead in New York, who could still lead if they exerted themselves to do so—and who dress and bear themselves most becomingly. I am afraid Mr. Gryde will think you are trifling, dear.

Little Mrs. Pert. Mr. Gryde must be quite accustomed to sitting still and having all kinds of rash remarks flying about his head. Don't trouble yourself about him, Mrs. Kindly. I have a conviction that, when he has done listening to our talk, he will have got some points of view that neither Mr. Bryce, nor Mr. Burns, nor M. Bourget seem to have discovered.

Mrs. Gramercy (pleasantly). You flatter yourself, Edith.

Little Mrs. Pert. Of course I do. I shouldn't be an American woman, else.

Mr. Easy (a bachelor of wealth and good temper, who has been on the outskirts of the group devoting himself to a débutante). When is our turn to come, Mrs. Gramercy?

Mrs. Gramercy. Do you mean what place shall we assign to the men of the day in our new Wonderland? Don't fear; we shall not neglect you. I have a word to say about the eccentrics of society who are made to do duty before the world as figure-heads of our New York morals and manners. I suppose no society could be brought together without having people like these for the others to talk about. London has its full share, Paris as many. If they get in, we must take care to let others see them as we really do, and not exalt these people we are laughing at among ourselves as arbiters and models. Then, there is a character in modern life who always reminds me of the tug that conveys a big steamship out of places where there is any difficulty for it to move alone—the toady, generally well-placed in the world, and often limited in purse, who accompanies the new-rich person in public, and shares her luxuries. In an ideal group

people will be sure of themselves, and the parasite will find her occupation gone.

Mr. Gryde (quoting "*King Canute*.") "Parasites exist always." On my word, I do not see the great difference between your types in New York and ours in London.

Mrs. Gramercy. Except that London is so much bigger, more animated, your average society is not judged by them. We, who are talking of these things, are in revolt, you see, against being classed, without an opportunity for protest, with a small and extremely narrow set of money-spenders whose fortunes dwarf ours, and whose customs extinguish more moderate endeavor among us. We should like the rest of the world to know we have some individuality apart from them. Even the keen sighted and friendly M. Bourget judged the whole of us by the few he met.

The Count de Rivoli. M. Bourget, Madame, meant to be all that is kind. It was such doughty champions as your M. Mark Twain who, entering the lists against him in serious earnest, made his utterances seem a more grave offence than they were.

Miss Marchmont. No doubt. No doubt. But you will not ask us to admit many of M. Bourget's American women into our ideal society.

Mr. Gryde (to Mr. Easy, who has come around to his side, and dropped into a wicker chair by the tea-table). Tell me. Am I to gather from what these ladies have been saying that your framers of the Constitution, when they shut out hereditary aristocracy from America, did not prevent the subsequent risk of a plutocratic aristocracy that is quite generally recognized throughout the country, and must, of necessity, be more harmful to your national character than our own abused respect for hereditary titles?

Mr. Easy (comfortably). Hum! They say so; but I believe most of it is newspaper talk, you know. Capital good fellows among that set, and no idea in the world of putting themselves on a pinnacle. No show about them, either, though they rather like to see their wives and daughters cut a dash.

Mr. Gryde (stroking his chin). This change in the conditions of the national mind of America seems to me immensely curious, and full of portent for the future.

Little Mrs. Pert (catching his last words). Don't make your-

self unhappy about our future, Mr. Gryde, now that we women have got it in hand. It's sure to be run well, if Mrs. Gramercy and Miss Marchmont and I take hold.

Mrs. Gramercy. I think we shall put a lock on your saucy tongue, Edith, if we let you in at all. Mr. Gryde, promise me to come to luncheon next Sunday when my husband will be here, and to let him talk over these matters with you from a man's point of view. I just wish you not to think that women dispose of every question in the States. Now, Ruth, dear, have we summed up all the things to be left out?

Miss Marchmont (sighing). I'm afraid not. The list is so long. You know we have always agreed that the people who do not value social triumph unless the newspapers display it to the world, are not to be let in. And those who do everything in such a hurry that they make one feel as if one's breath had given out. The fussy women, overcrowded with affairs; the women who wear jewels in day time; those who in company talk all together in a high and shrill key—

Little Mrs. Pert (interrupting). I vote that we have done with the women, and go for the men.

Mrs. Gramercy, Miss Marchmont and Mrs. Kindly (together). Agreed!

A silence, which is broken by Mrs. Gramercy. I'll declare, it is not so easy as I thought. It really seems as if we could not carry on the functions of social life without the "ornamental" men; there must be some on hand for dinners and opera boxes, and as ushers at weddings, and to lead cotillions, and drive four-in-hands, and sit behind club-windows. One reason New York is less attractive to look at than London is the rarity of this class in her uptown haunts. Some of them may not be very brilliant in conversation, but others are very lively, agreeable fellows, with plenty of native good sense and rather inclined to condole with themselves upon the leisure of their existence. Besides, they are generally cultivated in minor points, given to manly exercise, and—

Little Mrs. Pert (interrupting). In short, they meet a "felt want."

Miss Marchmont. I have no patience with you two.

Mrs. Gramercy. Until we shall have trained up a race of men who will not regard meetings for the interchange of ideas

with women as a bore, who is to take the place of those we now have? If the clever strong-brained men who, it must be, inhabit all those thousands of "offices" down-town, will not consent to emerge from them, what can we poor women do but make the best of the substitutes we have? I believe there are some American men who would regard an afternoon call upon a woman of society, who might offer him a cup of tea at five o'clock, as a distinct admission that he is a weakling and a fribble. This sort of resentment of conventionality is what often makes our men of parts seem crude in the eyes of trained foreigners. It appears to me about on a par with the refusal of the schoolboy to learn how to dance, because it makes him "girly"!

Mrs. Kindly. My dear, you are quite right. There are some of my young nephews and cousins to whom I am always preaching the doctrine of cultivating the exterior graces until they are acquired, and then forgetting all about them. It is so hard to persuade these lads that they will be none the less stalwart, none the less successful in business or in professions, for having a certain grace of manner and tact of speech.

Little Mrs. Pert. But what are you to do when such young men see their fathers refusing to mix with society on the ground that it is all very well for the women, but they have no time to spend on it, or are too tired when evening comes to do more than read a newspaper?

Mrs. Gramercy. The fact is, our husbands and fathers strain too much after success in affairs, and subordinate every other concern to that of making money. Some are in the toils of absorbing and exacting professions, and all of them chase from morning till night "to accomplish in their own lifetimes what in the past it took centuries to effect." We American women, who have the name of being the most indulged class upon earth, are often denied the one luxury we should prefer to all others—leisure time in the society of our husbands.

Mr. Gryde. That is very pathetic. I wish some of these gallant countrymen of yours could hear it.

Miss Marchmont (shrugs). They might say it was just another one of our eternal fads. You see, Mr. Gryde, we have come around the circle to where we began; it is the worship of the golden calf that possesses us, and is our bane.

Mr. Gryde (with a satisfied smile playing around the corners

of his mouth). Material well-being! High intelligence! Haven't you reached the high-water mark of all society? Why strive for ideals beyond this?

Mrs. Gramercy. That was spoken with indulgence as to a spoiled child. No, we shall not relinquish our bright dream. The more one thinks of it, the wider grows the prospect. There is no capital, no great city, where it could be realized so well as in New York.

The Count de Rivoli. May I enquire your plan?

Mr. Easy. Don't ask. Just wait and see results. It will be sure to be all right, if these ladies are to the fore.

Mr. Gryde. I may be kept busy in my own country and have no chance to see. At least you will give me a general outline of the scheme.

Miss Marchmont. The truth is, so far we have chiefly concerned ourselves with the elements to be left out. For the rest, I have a dim idea of a broad luminous circle of intelligent people of many nations and creeds and pursuits; they will all have moderate or at least not immoderate fortunes, a common recreation ground, and frequent meetings.

Little Mrs. Pert. There you are, off on your hobby, Ruth. Now, I am nothing if not practical; and I can see that these divers elements would be very hard to bring together and harder still to keep together.

Mrs. Gramercy. I am convinced that it can be done. Every year adds to the numbers of the class we would draw upon. The walls, if you like, might be supported by the fine ladies with their Worth gowns and jewelled tiaras, though, I think, by that time, the big fortunes will have been graded down; but the central spaces would be thronged with men and women who read, and think, and travel, and discuss, and keep abreast of the movement of the times. Among them would be some of the present class of dwellers in hall bed-rooms in boarding-houses, who would thus find a place for the indulgence of the social instinct. There would be men who can't afford clubs and are bored by theatres; men hard worked all day, who would otherwise be dozing over a newspaper in dull rooms at home until it should be time to go to bed. Busy lawyers and doctors, newspaper men and magazine editors, authors, artists and actors, students of foreign languages, accomplished musicians, experts in science, re-

turned travellers, teachers in schools, and professors in colleges—and, with them all, agreeable foreign visitors! What a host of these might not some Pied Piper of Hamelin witch out of their haunts even to-day in New York to enrich and enliven society? As it is, where does one ever see them congregate?

Little Mrs. Pert. Dear! You quite take my breath away. I hope there will be something for them to eat and drink beside little cakes and weak punch, the way they had it in the French *salons*. My experience is, to keep a genius up to the mark you have to feed him well.

Miss Marchmont (sharply). Nonsense! When it comes to this, I think we have talked long enough.

Mrs. Gramercy (suavely). Nobody minds Edith. But we shall not adjourn this assemblage until Mr. Easy gives us a glimpse into his opinion on this important theme. In the ideal society we will allow man to speak his mind, you know—after the ladies shall have uttered themselves, of course, and with reservation of our right to the last word if he chances to say anything deserving a reply.

Mr. Easy. In the first place, I think the ideal society will have done much to justify itself, if it abolishes the pernicious practice of promiscuous hand-shaking. Mr. Gryde will perhaps pardon me if I suggest that his countrymen of to-day are, in that matter, even more trying than we are. It is not everybody's hand that even a friend desires to take into his own, under all circumstances. And the only really agreeable method for an ordinary function of that sort is the Chinaman's. Among them, when a newcomer joins a group like this, for instance, there may be a good deal of hand-shaking, to be sure; but nobody shakes the other fellow's. Each clutches his own two hands very cordially, and shakes them with smiling salutation to everybody else.

Mr. Gryde. Yes; I think *that* a very good suggestion.

Mr. Easy. And, while I am making an example of the Orientals, I would borrow another idea from them for our new society. Much of the discomfort we get from envy of our neighbors, and many of the distressing disturbances of the serenity of our present social relations arise from the fact that our neighbor had a grandfather, and we had not. In China, the arrangement is much better; their polity is founded upon respect and vener-

ation for parents; among them, no man can be greater than his own father; and so, if he himself rises to be a prince, it is immediately discovered that his father was really a prince before him—and *his* father before *him*—"and so go on *ad infinitum*" into the remotest antiquity. Though the world may have seen those ancestors in the garb and avocation of rat-catchers, their self-imposed disguise is immediately penetrated in the light of the merit of their descendant; their modesty is no longer suffered to obscure their greatness. And when the elevation of an individual here shall ennoble, not his offspring, but all of his ancestors, every one in our ideal society, where every one is to be distinguished by merit of some kind, may be happy in the ease of manner and repose of mind which now belong only to one who has inherited such traits from at least three generations of training in everything of gentility demanded by the social code.

Mr. Gryde. What prompt relief you would thus afford to those of us in England who yearn to abolish the House of Lords!

Mr. Easy. And, if the ladies will indulge me a moment longer, I venture to suggest to them a final detail of infinite consequence to real happiness in any re-arrangement of society in America. Every school, everywhere, should have competent instructors in the use of the voice; every physician should carry in his pocket a prompt and effectual remedy for our national catarrh. There was a time the rustic Yankee dialect afforded the type for ridicule of our new-world snarl in utterance. But, whether New England has in this respect improved (and I think it has), or some of our more recent regions have developed peculiarities of voice so much more vexatious as to make the Yankee only seem better by comparison with others, the fact is that our most distressing twang in speech to-day is found west of the Hudson River. There is a metallic, unmusical and harsh buzz in the letter R, especially, that bewrayeth us to the least discerning of the rest of mankind; it ought to be abolished by you reformers, even if you must make a new alphabet that has no letter R in it. And, not only that, but, as we have ceased to be of a sparse population, our voices have become too loud. Our immigrants of nearly three hundred years ago brought with them the low and soft voices of their English progenitors; in the wilderness that received them they felt the awe of great solitudes, and must for a time have spoken in subdued tones—as do the wan-

derers to-day in the remote valleys of the great mountain ranges, or over the vast plains of our western wilds. But, as the woods have been cleared away and the prairies have come under cultivation and cities have multiplied, we have learned to address each other in voices like so many peacocks on house-tops exchanging views of the disturbers of the night. The distracting duets the Count has just mentioned as incidents of our dinner parties, are as nothing to the din, clangor, and uproar of a crowded afternoon tea in town. Yes, really you ladies must see to it that no one be admitted into our ideal society whose voice has not been properly assuaged.

Mrs. Gramercy. Come, come, Mr. Easy, what you say is all very true, and we shall make a note of it ; but when we asked you for an opinion we hardly expected you to go on at such length. Mr. Gryde, we have treated you unmercifully. But you shouldn't have encouraged us by that twinkle of the eye. And all the rest of you good people have submitted, like angels, to being talked at. Now come into the drawing-room, and let us have some music.

Mr. Gryde. Not till I thank you for having given me a glimpse at a new—a truly national, and I think a possible—structure of republican society.

Mrs. Gramercy (quietly). It will come—though I may not be here to see it.